

Farm children's understanding of animals in changing times: Autobiographies and farming culture¹

Alison Loveridge

University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch, New Zealand, alison.loveridge@canterbury.ac.nz

ABSTRACT

Farm children's experience with animals is changing. Farm animal welfare is promoted, pest control still occurs but is less visible than in the past, and environmental messages are pervasive. Differences between farm and urban children's experiences are less distinct than in the past. This article contributes to our understanding of change by studying autobiographies written by farm people since 1990 and provides a baseline of farm children's human-animal relationships to compare with contemporary experiences. Although less focused than interviews with elderly people, the autobiographies provide a holistic view of where animals fit with farm children's other concerns. Farming income in the first half of the twentieth century was often low and the pressure this put on people and animals was evident. A hierarchy of relationships from bonding with pets to domination of production animals and pests was strongly established with children showing gendered responses to many aspects of farm life. The intertwined themes of family and pioneering appear to have shaped what people remembered and what they wished to draw attention to in their books - the nature of autobiographical memory is discussed to assist in interpretation of the data.

Key words: Farm animals, Feral animals, Children, Intergenerational change

Introduction

Animals are compelling to children in many guises, not only as living creatures but also as represented in books, film and other media (Myers and Saunders 2002; Melson 2001). It is not surprising that adults wishing to promote the killing of animals in pursuit of sport, farm production or nature conservation should actively campaign to capture children's attention and induct them into their world view. The jockeying for control of children's opinion of animals that are defined as out of place, such as rabbits,² has initiated a new round of attention to children's response to animals that have been transferred from their original ecosystems into places where their adaptive abilities and high fertility allow them to out-compete existing species. Despite this attention, children's relationships to introduced species of any type, farm animals as well as feral animals like rabbits, are still quite poorly represented in academic literature, which has been more likely to focus on companion animals.

This study aims to contribute to the debate over children's responses to animals by highlighting perceived differences between the views and responses of farm and urban children. Both are influenced by media representations of animals, but farm children's relationship to animals has additional

dimensions that can be better understood through an analysis of rural autobiographies. Autobiographies that include substantial coverage of childhood memories of the first half of the twentieth century provide an opportunity for a holistic analysis of children's relationship with animals and a base for understanding the processes of change over time. The methodological implications of working with autobiographies will also be discussed, as people's memories of their childhoods are shaped by their social context, both in the past and at the time of writing, and must be seen as socially constructed rather than as direct reflections of the past.

Adult discourses about rabbits and other out of place species clearly signal that all children are not perceived to be the same (Smith 2006: 373-374). Farming community children are generally positioned as having the 'right' attitude to the killing of animals, they are assumed to have internalised the hierarchy of animals that allows people to functionally differentiate similar animals (Dominy 2001: 199).³ They are said to understand that some members of species can be loved as companions while others are worked or treated only as consumables; similar species can be divided into those seen as acceptable and

1. This paper is in a series on the theme of Animals and Society, edited by Carol Freeman and Natalie Edwards for *Australian Zoologist*.
2. A campaign to substitute Easter bunnies *Oryctolagus cuniculus* with Easter bilbies was instituted in 1991 in order to raise awareness of Australian endangered species and counter concern for the welfare of rabbits. It involves sale of chocolate bilbies at Easter; associated educational programmes for children, popular children's books promoting bilbies but demonising rabbits, and conservation work with the bilbies themselves such as breeding programmes and protection of habitat (Save the Bilby Fund 2007). A similar campaign has been occasionally discussed in New Zealand but never implemented (NZPA 2007: A4). A bilby *Macrotis lagotis* is a small indigenous marsupial, which lives in burrows and was formerly common in similar ecosystems to those where rabbits now flourish, but is now highly endangered.
3. Leach's hierarchy of relationships to British animals as strangers, friends, enemies etc. has been the basis of many analyses of relationships in different environments e.g. Franklin (2006: 7).

those to be exterminated (Melson 2001; Wilkie 2005). The practice of differentiating animals' lives and deaths is endorsed by environmentalists who promote the extermination of introduced species (in order to protect indigenous ones). Understanding how children view animal deaths will illuminate children's relationships with animals in general. This paper addresses questions such as: How do children relate to live animals versus representations of animals? How do they learn about animals? How do they make moral judgements about the treatment of animals? How does their social and economic context influence these processes?

Contemporary attention to feral introduced species highlights changes in farm children's experience. In the past, farm children in areas where rabbits were prevalent had first hand understanding of the negative economic impact rabbits caused to farming. Rural children (mostly boys) were involved with killing them on their own account as this provided substantial income as well as sport (McDowall 1994; Smith 2006). Consensus on extermination was pervasive and killing rabbits, referred to as 'pest control', was done with little or no attention to the means of killing other than to maximise efficiency. With the relative success of biological control of rabbits by rabbit calicivirus (RCD), contemporary farm children in Australia and New Zealand are now more distanced from the killing of small animals that compete with farmed ones. In New Zealand, adults control possum populations through poisoning, rather than through the trapping methods of the past (Isern 2003). In both countries media are increasingly pervasive and raise alternative views on the killing of animals. Animal welfare on farms is more closely regulated and on-farm practices are changing (Matthews, Loveridge and Guerin 1994).

In both countries, farm interests and values have been dominant throughout their histories (Phillips 1996; Bell 1997; Smith 2006; Franklin 2006). However, times are changing albeit gradually. Nick Smith (2006) suggests that environmental campaigns such as the selling of chocolate bilbies with the aim of raising awareness among Australian children of the bilbies' plight, involve the grafting of a colonial, productivist ethos onto an eco-national mythology, without challenging the developmentalist logic that people should be in control of nature. The slow change from Britainisation to appreciation of the indigenous Australian ecosystems and the association of local plants and animals with national identity described by Smith (2006) and Franklin (2006) is echoed in New Zealand (Pawson and Brooking 2003).

Farm and urban children are now exposed to many discourses about animals other than mainstream commercial ones. Some of these prioritise animal welfare, some the environment, and in general children are encouraged to question topical issues and make complex moral judgements (Kahn and Kellert 2002; Dobrin and Kidd 2004). Contemporary children are drawn into environmental activities by local campaigns such as *Save the Bilby*. They have access to the World Wide Web and many animal welfare and environmental organisations

also encourage inclusion of children through special sections of their web pages (Stomfay-Stitz, A. M. and Wheeler, E. 2008). Children learn about animals and nature through school curricula, magazines, TV, and clubs such as the Scouts and Guides that continue traditional outdoor activities with a new emphasis on environmental concerns (Dobrin and Kidd 2004; Lindahl Elliot 2006).

The interplay of contemporary, urban generated ideas and farm experience is complex. Farming involves tension – it is both attractive to those who enjoy working with animals and involves exploitation of animals. It promotes both the concept of stewardship and short term responses to public demands mediated by multinational food processors (Franklin 1999; Dominy 2001). The growth of part time farming by urban people further blurs the boundaries between animals as companions and production units (Holloway 2001).

Elder and Conger (2000: 14-15) suggest that farm families have a stronger influence on their children than urban families because of their joint activities on the farm and their community networks, but the authors emphasise the complexity of these interactions. These are only tendencies and not all rural children inherit the opinions and practices of their caregivers (Potts and White 2007). For example, an extraordinarily high number of people in Potts and White's sample of ethical consumers who practiced "cruelty-free" consumption came from farms. Pointing to the importance of detailed understanding of personal context, out of 157 self-selected participants in the in-depth survey, 38% had either grown up on farms, were closely associated with farms or had sought employment on farms. These were mainly women. Most "described negative, disturbing, even traumatic farm experiences as children or teenagers" (Potts and White 2007: 24).

In keeping with the assumptions of environmental campaigners and ecocriticism in general (Dobrin and Kidd 2004), reading materials and personal experience were found to influence survey participants' ethical decision making:

M29: I was read and read stories about animals on farms that cared for each other and had personalities – but then was asked to eat meat made from these same cute cuddly animals that in the books could talk. This was a conflict I couldn't resolve in my head at the time. [58, ovovegetarian, Kaitaia]

(Potts and White 2007: 23)

Potts and White highlight the importance of gender as 77% of those interviewed were women (2007: 14). Kellert's seminal research suggests that there are some differences in male and female children's approach to animals. In addition, rural children were found to be more knowledgeable and interested in animals than urban ones, but considerable development in children's understanding of animals and their welfare took place over time (Kellert 1985). In a survey of 267 Connecticut children he found younger children (under 10 years) were less knowledgeable or concerned with rights and protection of animals. He also found them more anthropocentric:

These results were somewhat surprising, perhaps due to our society's idealization of young children's perceptions of animals. The tendency is to believe that young children have some natural affinity for living creatures, regarding them as little friends or kindred spirits.

(Kellert 1985: 33)

Studying the stories adults tell about their childhoods complements the insights from ecocriticism's discourse analysis and confirms that children do not "naturally" prioritise farming, but that considerable attention has to be given to socializing children into attitudes that allow them to tolerate the more exploitive aspects of handling farm animals and killing pests.

Environmental campaigns and ongoing farm discourse targeting rabbits or other out of place animals tend to underplay the importance of these specificities in their challenges to popular animal images (e.g. Morrison 1996). Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit is often mobilized in political rhetoric where he "stands for" the wild. To the production oriented, impatient with members of the urban public who are seen to be overly sympathetic to the suffering of individual rabbits, he is a problem, not a valued promoter of environmental sensitivity. Peter Rabbit is such an iconic figure he is even viewed as a threat to the legitimacy of killing other introduced species and liable to make the public overly concerned about the risk of new management techniques that might have unintended side affects.⁴ In this discourse, farming children are represented as having the "right" attitudes towards the killing of animals despite the strong possibility they have been as exposed to popular animal narratives as their urban counterparts:

It is not hard to drum up sympathy for chickens, pigs, and other food animals in societies where the mainly urban populations are significantly divorced from and ignorant of the realities about where their food comes from. When you are brought up with bunny rabbits running round the edge of your porridge plate, weaned on Peter Rabbit stories, and grow up to "Watership Down", you are not instinctively a supporter of rabbit pest management strategies. Jim Sutton [Minister of Agriculture at the time] addresses the Veterinarians Association, Wellington 2003.

Nick Smith's analysis of the cultural significance of rabbits raises the differences between his personal experience of rabbits in his youth as good to hunt and eat, the way they are presented in popular culture, and the way they are treated in environmental discourse. He himself hunted rabbits for pelts and rabbit meat and he states that "underground mutton" often contributed to his family's diet. Smith distances himself from what he sees as popular sentiments about the welfare of rabbits. "My affection does not stem from infant fascination with the musings of Beatrix Potter ... I relished what seemed to my 'pre-green'

sensibilities, an extraordinary 'wild' and 'free' bounty." (Smith 2006: 373). This prioritising of direct experience over mediated sentiments and rhetorical use of Peter Rabbit is reminiscent of Sutton, quoted above (2003).

Importantly, disagreement exists over the meaning of the adult public's views about animals, despite several research projects conducted during the 1990s. The data often points to the contradictory nature of human-animal relations. For example, surveys of public opinion in both Australia and New Zealand show a remarkable level of support for killing of rabbits in spite of the high proportion who thought they were cute. In New Zealand in 1994, 62% of adults surveyed thought rabbits were cute but 90% of adults surveyed thought rabbits should be exterminated (60%) or managed at low numbers. Not unexpectedly, urban females were more likely than rural males to think rabbits were cute (Fitzgerald, Saunders and Wilkinson 1994: 56, 75). Fraser notes attitudes were similar in Australia and New Zealand (2001: 24).

Although changes in children's relationship with animals are likely to occur over time, at present there is not enough published on children's views to establish a baseline for comparison across generations. As Smith notes, his experience is not available to contemporary children. The surveys summarised by Fraser (2001) were carried out in the 1990s and use of the Internet by children has changed enormously since then. There are some methodological problems in working with children themselves and with capturing their everyday experiences with animals and responses to target species. There are additional ethical issues to be overcome before children could be directly involved in an exploration of the meaning of killing animals. Use of autobiographical material avoids these problems and indicates how children absorb ideas about animals from their parents.

Chawla suggests that an autobiographical approach can be useful in identifying how environmental activism develops and her model seems appropriate for investigating relationships with animals. In an extended programme of research, she first analysed adults' relationships to the places in which they grew up, as expressed in their autobiographies. Within these texts, she identified adults' experiences with nature and the extent to which these were valued (Chawla 1986). She then interviewed environmental activists using a life history approach (Chawla 1999). Her most recent work examines the importance of short moments of intense engagement with nature, rather than extended periods of contact with the natural world (Chawla 2002).

In general, the activists Chawla interviewed felt contact with nature in childhood had amplified their dedication to environmental issues. The 38 authors of the autobiographies differed, however, according to their professional backgrounds – scientists and law makers were much less influenced by contact with nature than people

4. Peter Rabbit is even used rhetorically in this way in Britain where the rabbit is accepted as local and he is enormously popular. The books have been in print since 1906 and are currently available in 21 languages (www.peterrabbit.com downloaded 28 /8/07). While Copeland (2004) analyses Peter's ability to promote care of the wild, the demonisation of rabbits is typical of handling of pest species (Milton 2007). Milton's study of attitudes to possums in New Zealand had a major impact on my early thinking about children and animals.

involved with the arts, raising the question as to where farm children might be situated on this continuum? They spend time with animals and nature but this contact is usually within the context of farm work, making their everyday experiences very different to the sporadic experiences of urban children (Chawla 1986).

Milton proposes a sequence of experiences building to activism in which the influential people present in childhood assist in providing stepping stones – insufficient on their own but important in launching the process (2002: 70-72). Animals provide particularly vivid and influential experiences.⁵ Farm life is one of the launching points towards environmental activism (Chawla 1999: 18), but it may also engender much more exploitative relationships with farm land and animals (Wilkie 2005). Studying the autobiographies of people who spent their childhoods on farms allows the complex combination of influences on relationships with animals, as prioritised by their authors, to become clear. It has the potential to show how the author integrates insights from messages in literary and other media with their everyday experiences with animals. Autobiographies also include general comment on transmission of identities and practices from one generation to the next.

Methodology

Autobiographies provide an effective means of identifying what is important to the writer in terms of presentation of themselves to their community. However, the process of memory loss and refinement plus lack of focus on the researcher's interests means the texts are not equivalent to interviews. Because autobiographies are used more rarely than interviews or surveys it is important to reflect on the methodological literature about the nature of autobiographical memory before interpreting what our authors wrote about their childhoods:

- Most memories disappear after a few months and the ones we remember are continually being reintegrated into our sense of our selves, so the same event may mean something different to the writer at 70 years than it did when they were 12 years old (Chawla 1999: 16; Miller, Fung and Koven 2007);
- We remember intensely as we grow towards adulthood because we do things for the first time, becoming independent, developing a sense of self and direction (Misztal 2003: 85);

- Sharing an experience heightens emotion, so we will remember shared events more often than thoughts and experiences we had when alone (Misztal 2003: 81);
- Events of major significance can create defining moments for those who lived through them, particularly those in a common relationship to that event (Misztal 2003: 86-7). In farming the transition from animal traction is one such moment;
- We will draw on a variety of cultural resources to help us interpret our lives. Repeated retelling of stories is part of the process of incorporation of such stories into autobiographical memory (Miller et al 2007: 596).

These factors need to be taken into account in the interpretation of autobiographical material.

Autobiography and New Zealand Farming Culture

New Zealanders publish many autobiographies written by people who have spent a large part of their lives living on a farm and I have discussed the nature of this genre and autobiographical memory in more detail elsewhere (Loveridge 2004). My collection of farm autobiographies is itself a social artefact.⁶ The texts examined for this paper were published between 1990 and 2006, with fewer published recently, probably because of a time lapse before this work comes to the attention of libraries, or changes in purchasing patterns, rather than due to fewer being written. Almost all were self published or published by small publishers with local reputations. In New Zealand, locally written rural yarns are consistently popular.⁷

Because rural autobiographies are usually retirement projects, the mean date of birth of the writers is 1916, even though only books published since 1990 were studied.⁸ After 50 years of age, people forget recent events more quickly and give more space to memories of the past (Kotre 1995: 169). By 70 years of age, people are preparing to transmit both personal and cultural heritage to the next generation – the personal passes into collective life, often in an autobiographical form. (Kotre 1995: 173).

About 75 rural autobiographies published in the period from 1990 to 2006 were examined, most written by men. Rural life holds an iconic place in New Zealand national identity, drawing upon stories of pioneering heroism and intimacy with nature. New Zealand's largest selling novelist, Barry Crump, drew on his experience

5 Activists may relate to animals as having personhood, one component of which is appreciation that they experience emotions and act intentionally (Milton 2002: 82). Milton also considers reading and the power of nostalgia as routes to connection with nature (2002: 119-124). Children incorporate stories into their tool box for regulating emotions. For example, Peter Rabbit's experience is available for children to apply to their own problems (Miller, Fung and Koven 2007: 603).

6 Theoretically, the National Library's Bibliographic Database holds the details of every New Zealand writer's books. In reality, many farm autobiographies are informally published, and may not be sent to a professional printer who might advise on acquiring an ISBN number nor may they reach a local library, which would forward their bibliographic details to the National Library (Broadbent, 2003). Most of the books I studied were listed in the National Bibliographic Database and available in Canterbury. A few were located through second hand book shops. Self publication makes collecting such books harder because their distribution is so local.

7 Few informal Australian publications are available in New Zealand but those I have seen, along with high profile autobiographies, are very similar to New Zealand ones.

8 A few books were published by family members after the writers' deaths, so the mean age of 76 at publication was high. Some women started earlier, when space for writing opened up, for instance when children finished correspondence school.

as a farm worker and deer culler to glorify a mythical real man: competent, creative and free from restraints and respectability. Perpetuation of New Zealand's rural myths has been studied extensively, in literature, (Jensen, 1996; Evans 2007) in television (Campbell and Kraak 1998; Perry 1994), in the construction of local heritage sites (Bell, 1997), and history (Phillips, 1996). The dominance of male roles, of engagement with nature, and the construction of community through the melting pot of pioneering endeavour are well documented. The autobiographies are themselves a specific cultural form (Misztal 2003: 87). Their messages for coming generations emphasise pioneering or overcoming physical hardship, hard work, and support for the family, sometimes with a sense that young people should turn back to the values of the past. Animals feature in so many of these autobiographies that their importance to this transmission of values is clear.

Analysing childhood in the autobiographies

I have chosen to approach the autobiographies both quantitatively and qualitatively. I began by coding the texts for themes and assessing how common these were. Initial codes were based on:

- Tasks of those who have been handling farm animals on a daily basis;
- Examples of process of learning about animals (e.g. a story about learning to milk);
- Orientation towards various animals implied in the stories told about animals, particularly stories about killing and cruelty and about a hierarchical approach to individual animals and to species;
- Context – class, family situation, attendance at school etc;
- Moral development (general and in relation to animals).

For the purposes of this analysis, childhood was defined as ending when the narrator started their first full time job. At that time the school leaving age was 14 years, but those born into wealthier families had a longer 'childhood' by several years. The autobiographies clearly show that during childhood a sense of responsibility to the farm was counterbalanced by spontaneous decisions and desire for informal play. For someone working on their parents' farm after leaving school, full time work could lead to new relationships with animals.

Of the books identified in the period 1990-2006, about one third were discarded from the analysis because there was little or no discussion of childhood.⁹ For some, the story opens with their first farm job and only a page or two

of background is provided. Women wrote slightly more about their childhoods (42% of women's versus 26% of the men's books recounted events before full time work and the average length of childhood texts for males was 37 pages, for females it was 58 pages). Birth dates ranged from 1902 to 1939, but there were no clear differences in relationships with animals across the decades, partly because there were fewer recent autobiographies and partly because major social change, such as the increase in school leaving age to 15 years, came at the end of this period (1937).

Some of the autobiographies are almost entirely about childhood. A few recount lives that were extremely difficult because of parental neglect and poverty. For some of these authors their autobiography was a means of explaining how they grew to be the person their family and friends had come to know. Others tried to bring to life the lifestyles of the past and historical details, such as ploughing with a horse team or cooking on a coal range, feature prominently. These authors might also include family histories going back to the generation that emigrated from the United Kingdom.¹⁰ Some authors were clearly well known for their story telling and were committing to print stories, such as highlights of hunting expeditions, that had been polished over many years. A number commented on the pleasure they took in reading when this was possible or had kept diaries for many years and so appeared to relate to a community of readers beyond their family circle. Some had written more than one book, for instance family and district history or a life story in several volumes. Small numbers had been on writing courses organized locally, or had social networks in which they came in contact with others who were doing writing of this nature.

Many of the autobiographies have a style reminiscent of two other sites where ordinary farm people wrote about their experiences. These sites, which have been subject to previous academic study, include *The Dairy Exporter* (O'Connor, 2001) and the children's pages of the various regional newspapers (Holt 2000). *The Dairy Exporter*¹¹ had a women's section that included paragraphs contributed by readers and short story competitions with 'Tui' as editor (O'Connor, 2001: 6). The contributions of readers created a space for writing about farm life and helped to shape such writing. The style encouraged by the editor is still evident in the rural autobiographies: "I want you to describe a thing, or tell an incident in your own natural way; write it just as you would tell others" (Tui DE [Dairy Exporter] April 1928, cited in O'Connor, 2001: 49).

The children's pages provide a contemporary source of writing for comparison with the retrospective view of the autobiographies.

9. Only four published in the 1990s were written by people born before the turn of the century and these were also discarded so as to keep aspects of historical context contained. Increasing the number of autobiographies studied would have only increased the average age of the authors and the distance in time from contemporary standards for handling farm animals.

10. Only migrants from the United Kingdom were located for this sample. Some were born there. New Zealand gave non-farm boys opportunities that were not available to the tiny number who had emigrated from England, but with mentoring from experienced stockmen the immigrants represented themselves as soon fitting in.

11. Established in 1925.

Discussion of Farm Children's Experience with Animals in the Early Twentieth Century

Socioeconomic status and rural community involvement

Sutton's (2003) comments about Peter Rabbit, with their implication that animals should be viewed through a productivist lens and that rural people have the 'right' approach, suggest that material should be coded according to family background and expression of opinions that were most consistent with the farming culture commented on above. Political activity proved to be less influential than farm background or class on relationships with and perceptions of animals i.e. it was limited because production values were so pervasive.

The memoirs of Dick Scott (2004) demonstrate the influence of background and the way his responses to animals developed as his context changed. In an attempt to seek out security during the Depression, Scott's parents moved to a dairy farm when he was aged eight years. His middle class mother did not let him milk cows. His dogs were his companions and he developed feelings of ambivalence about shooting birds with his new air rifle as a teenager. After training at Massey Agricultural College he briefly became a herd tester and was shocked by one farmer's display of overt cruelty towards the animals. Scott was also shocked by the farmer's low income. Yet, when he himself became a sharemilker for a season he experienced some of these stresses for himself.

"Slithering in a sea of scours-stained mud and sustained for the task on meals of Weetbix and potatoes, the animal-as-adversary mentality, once so righteously deplored as a first signal of Marx's rural idiocy, was not slow to surface." (Scott 2004: 85).

On this farm, the owner failed to provide food for the pigs that had been purchased to drink the whey, and many of the underfed animals also developed prolapsed rectums and died. Calves that were slow to learn to drink from the bucket were pushed aside for those who were "sensibly compliant" (Scott 2004: 86). Scott's life as a radical and writer made it possible for him to examine some of the negative aspects of his early experiences that are rarely covered in men's accounts of their life on farms.¹² Unlike most, he left farming and did not display the strong support for farming and pioneering values that was typical of this genre.

Expression of Emotion

Although I wanted to identify a sense of development of relationship with animals, the authors' messages had to be interpreted in the light of the culture of their era, which valued an active and managerial approach to nature rather than a reflective one (Pawson and Brooking 2003). There was little direct comment on welfare issues. Rabbits

generally existed only to be caught, men appeared to have no empathy for their situation, though only a couple of comments included emotional content that seemed to demonise them. Herbert Duff (born 1914) emphasized tough economic times when he mentioned the killing of rabbits: "I had some money because I shot and trapped rabbits which were a curse on the farm and as I developed into a shepherd I was allowed to pluck wool off dead sheep and sell it for myself." (1994: 33).

Although for a few, animals could be beloved companions who were more reliable than some of the people in their lives, it was commonly implied in these types of stories that children had limited agency. Jim Hargreaves (born 1921) tells the story of his father trying to plough with the bull when the horse was lame. "Talk about funny, after an hour's battle between man, beast and plough it was given up as a bad job! So Bob lame foot and all was brought in to do his duty. Poor old Bob, he worked hard all his life." (Hargreaves 2000: 50). The same author recalled his parents going without food during the Depression to safeguard his health. He was more explicit about his emotions than other men, but venerated stoicism and denigrated those who achieved success without hard physical work. His solution to the problems of poor Bob was to replace him with machinery.

Intergenerational exchange

Overwhelmingly, messages about character were related to hard work and family. Development of character was often attributed to parents' attempts to discipline their children, consistent with Goodyear and others' observation that a father centred, authoritarian family whose goal was production was still common in rural areas in that period, especially among working class families. The mother centred family which protected members buffeted in the battle for income outside the family developed earlier in urban areas (Phillips 1996; Goodyear 2006: 76).

The level of physical discipline recorded was very high by contemporary standards and about one quarter either recorded high levels of violence within their home or complained that their fathers were uncaring. Maclean (2006: 7) has discussed violence in the home using newspaper reports of court cases that took place a few years before the childhoods recounted in these autobiographies. The cases confirm that the range of disciplines described in the autobiographies would not have been considered serious enough for outside intervention, though some writers questioned the justice of these experiences retrospectively. The ideal of success through independent personal effort was hard to achieve given the economic constraints of the Depression.

Parents taught their children how to discipline animals by example. Children recounted stories in which adults were locked in conflict with "difficult" animals (and sometimes with children). Whether the outcome was triumph or disaster the story was often handled with wry humour:

¹² The degree of suppression of early sexual activity in these stories is another example of the way they are constructed around publicly agreed on conventions. Nancy Sutherland, born in 1910 in the isolated Marlborough Sounds and later an activist for women's issues, gives a woman's point of view of the social restrictions of her childhood. She is similar to Scott in the way that she challenges the conventions of rural life story production (1986: 178).

Jean Nott, born 1912 “Dad said to my brother Albert who was standing by, “Get that long stick there and give her a prod in the rump.” Albert did so but didn’t prod very hard. “That’s no good”, says Dad. “Give her a good hard prod.” Albert did so. Jip took off, the other horses likewise.” (1994: 13).

Discipline of children could be harsh even when the narrators considered their parents had not breached normal standards of the era. Many tasks were learnt by helping and observing, with the expectation that children would grasp what was required rapidly and should be punished if they did not. Arthur Scaife (born 1920) was afraid of horses as a preschooler, but started to gain confidence on a quiet horse until his father intervened. “My confidence almost disappeared again as father sat me on Boffles bare back and gave her a smack on the behind.” (1991: 15). Most children receiving regular physical discipline responded robustly, attempting to avoid punishment, but also pursuing their own interests where possible. When “Pirate” Kerr deliberately lodged an air gun pellet in his sister’s leg his father confiscated the airgun “but I often think of that as the best shot of my life” (Kerr and Kerr 2000: 24). Girls might also operate on this conflictual model of parent child relations. For both boys and girls, conflict with mothers was a less common event (Sutherland 1986: 170).

Interpretation of these autobiographies required some ‘reading between the lines’, particularly with regard to human-animal relationships. Good management of working and production animals was favoured, but the laconic style of story telling means that the reader is left to deduce the author’s position on human-animal relationships, beyond their motivations to entertain and document ‘how things were in those days’, when good management was not attained.

Gender and Animals

Although some men did reflect on tensions between human and non-human animals and their emotional bonds with specific individual animals, this was much more the preserve of women. The question is how much this is a difference in self expression, as caring for animals was part of girls’ general socialization into caring and therefore publicly acceptable, even expected, and how much it is a difference of relationship.

One woman remembered multiple, conflicting influences on her relationships with animals and nature. One such influence was Longfellow’s poem, *Evangeline*, recited to her by her sister who had learnt it at school:

Lois Longden, born 1902 “This is the forest primeval,” she commenced and then paused for a moment. Instantly those words caught my attention as did the description that followed of great trees that had stood for centuries. ... What beautiful meaningful words they seemed... Ordinarily, of course, though young I was aware that sentiment did not rule about such things in

our valley, that men had come with axes, wedges and cross-cut saws, with the single purpose of turning virgin forest land into farms that they hoped would bring security to themselves and their families.” (1990: 17-18).

Lois also commented on the place of pets on a pioneer farm, applying an adult’s view to her play:

“So much around us gave us pleasure. The increasing animal life, including cats and their kittens of ginger, tortoiseshell, grey and black. The kittens sometimes mysteriously disappeared. The cuddlesome puppies were a joy, but not our playthings. They must not be spoilt for training as good farm dogs. ... At will we took pleasure from these animals and then turned to other things” (1990: 61).

Hilda Mill, born 1903, emphasized the importance of gender and animals to the development of nurturing behaviours: “Once I made a little hospital for anything that was hurt, such as a butterfly with an injured wing and various other insects.” (1996: 24).

There were major differences in the ways men and women recounted their childhoods on several levels. Both boys and girls began helping with chores as they became able to perform simple tasks (such as collecting wood), and by their teens might be spending several hours a day on them. Interviews with elderly people reveal a similar workload (Park 1991; Toynbee 1995; Goodyear 2006). Many of the farm tasks involved animals with both boys and girls helping to milk house cows or commercial herds. Other tasks were bringing in animals, or feeding chooks, graduating to lambing and helping with other births, and milking. Nora Brocas Sanderson noted that children who could not milk by age seven were “looked on with scorn” and that skills associated with the handling of animals were considered a prerequisite to marriage (1999: 37). Daley (1998) compares the childhood memories of brothers and sisters and notes that men and women have different memories, partly because they were involved in different activities due to their gender, and partly because they remembered what was appropriate to their gender. Boys and girls commented on the division of labour among their siblings and indicated that girls were generally doing inside work more than boys.

With the exception of hunting, class differences were less evident in relation to animal activities than other responsibilities. Wealthy households had paid staff, but the reverence for the virtue of hard work crossed class boundaries and the children of wealthy families might help out on a more voluntary basis when they were not at boarding school.¹³ Gender was, however, an influential source of difference. Over two thirds of women told stories about milking compared to one third of men. Ernie Symons’ story is typical of both genders (he was born 1919):

13. There were few girls from wealthier families in the sample but Dominy’s (2001) commentary on gender and inheritance in the high country affirms that their distance from farm animals in my sample is typical.

"Their wellbeing had absolute priority at all times. We milked them, fed them, watered them, treated them when they were sick, mated them, calved them – even loved the sods sometimes (but not often)... On cold frosty mornings ... They [cows] were so soft and warm and comforting you would almost drift off to sleep, until a voice further along the shed would bellow "Hey what's taking you so long with that cow?" I fancy I must have been a lazy little so-and-so, I always seemed to be tired" (Symons 1997: 16-20).

Morris (2002) writes about the taboo on women killing animals in high country farming partnerships and this seems long established and spread across other farming systems. Two girls went rabbiting with family, and occasionally girls went fishing but none went hunting. Girl's comments on welfare may show some retrospective awareness of changing values but this was more evident as writers covered their adult lives.

Both men and women told stories about dogs and horses that demonstrated their special relationship with these animals, but women were more likely to extend empathy to other animals. Hand reared calves and lambs also had special status. Nearly half of the authors wrote detailed stories demonstrating their knowledge of animal behaviour and skills in managing them, and many told stories that showed they appreciated the animals' company. Arthur Scaife's (born 1920) interest in sheep was less usual. His first muster, at the age of five, changed the direction of his life and on wet days he would play inside at drafting sheep and other farm tasks using packs of cards as sheep. "Father's punch made good ear markers and crayons perfect raddle for marking those fit for the freezing works, mutton or dog tucker" (Scaife 1991: 17).

Leisure and animals

Authors recounted few structured leisure experiences, such as competitive sports, outside school, but both boys and girls had considerable freedom to roam around the farms and go riding, swimming, fishing etc. Swimming holes were especially treasured. Groups of child-explorers were sometimes gendered. If they were in mixed groups, coming home from school for instance, girls were sometimes active but at other times they looked on and provided a parental view. Boys roamed further. Although many boys participated in hunting and fishing to supplement the family diet and control pests, these activities were narrated with the enthusiasm of play. Subsequently many hunted as adults, graduating from rabbits to deer or pigs.

Leo Winstanley (born 1917) "At that young age horses and dogs I idolized. Any stray dogs I would take home and feed and make a fuss of. At ten, I had my first dog – a Lurcher – that could catch rabbits with ease and later turned out to be an excellent pig dog" (1995: 8).

Death and Animals

Attitudes to the deaths of animals were very clearly displayed in terms of a hierarchy of species, from dogs (who could be friends as well as workers) to farm stock (who were usually neither). Jack Fulton (born 1925) had a poor relationship

with his mother and showed little regret when he recalled the time he poisoned her prize hens as a preschooler. He watched his mother treat her hens for lice and decided to improve on her methods by dipping them in kerosene. "They flew up the wire, raced around the yard, went absolutely berserk and the whole lot died. I can't remember what penalty I got for it but I had a great time." (Fulton 2005: 5). He received sporadic supervision from his wealthy parents and their staff and although his father was extremely distant he valued farming activities and appeared to see little value in keeping hens or activities he saw as feminine.

"Letting go" of older animals and responding to their deaths were considered acceptable expressions of emotion: both boys and girls freely expressed grief. When Lyndsay Jameson's (born 1926) father deserted their struggling dairy farm, leaving behind his wife and five children, she attended the forced sale of all their property. Their horse and dog had to be auctioned. "Who I thought would not want a couple of darling old animals like them? Then my common sense told me – everyone." When nobody wanted them, the animals were shot. "I huddled down into a mattress on the truck and cried all the way to Kaitaia." (Jameson 2001: 141). Sheep had a very different value to Frederick Ward (born 1916, then aged about 14) as he traveled on an isolated road with a group of young men - the behaviour of the group is similar to that recounted in some hunting stories:

"one sheep saw nothing but the road and took off with us coming up behind. The closer we came the faster the sheep ran. We tooted the horn, slowed down, and gave him every chance. But those back country sheep were wiry creatures, and with speed previously unknown, there was plenty of road left to keep up the sprint. So it's straight ahead with Roy behind the wheel. You could hear his brain working "sheep you've had your chance", so he moves in and WHANG, the sheep seems to just sail into the air. A beautiful arch and the road is clear, so we press on. No doubt someone has set a faster time to Blenheim since then, but it was one of those thrills which kept us young people going in hard times. We had our Christmas at home and returned to the Muller next day" (1995: 68).

Conclusion

The people whose autobiographies are presented here are the parents and grandparents of people who are currently farming or are associated with farm people. Most social research covers one moment in time and thus does not comment on the exact processes through which people's experiences are influential across generations. The nature of the older generation's influence on contemporary issues, such as regulation of animal welfare, is therefore neglected. Elder and Conger (2000) suggest that grandparents are important figures, but they do not examine the specifics of farm life.

When attempting to assess changes in farm life over time, autobiographies cannot be taken as direct representations of earlier experiences. What is written is shaped by conceptions of what is appropriate to a public document about farming produced in a community where farming

is valued. These documents are also produced at a time when farming is rapidly changing. Some autobiographies comment overtly on change, but all are concerned with shaping the future. Animal stories are important to those writing about their childhoods, often with the aim of passing messages to their grandchildren, but these stories are subservient to themes such as support for family values, or hard work, or ideal gender roles. This needs to be kept in mind when interpreting the meaning of early experiences for comparison with contemporary ones and when speculating on their implications for further research.

There is enough continuity from the childhoods of the twentieth century to those of the present day to suggest it is worth understanding more about the ways in which some of the more overtly productivist practices develop in young people as they take on greater responsibilities during their transition to adulthood. Lois Longden's autobiography affirms that there were many sources of influence on her relationships with animals. She played with some of them, farmed others, and her love of the bush birds that surrounded her home before the farm was fully cleared was inseparable from her love of Longfellow's poem about the primeval forest.¹⁴ She also recorded playing alone among the stumps and ferns in a way that is fully consistent with Chawla's focus on the intense moments of engagement with nature that can stay with someone for life (2002: 202). Although the research Chawla draws on to develop this concept refers to urban or small town dwellers, farm children in New Zealand clearly had intense relationships with their natural surroundings and with at least some of the animals they interacted with. Contemporary farmers improve welfare for farm animals as part of their drive for productivity and see the hunting of introduced species as part of maintaining their environment. Like Lois they may support mixed and sometimes conflicting goals.

Rural women writing autobiographies sometimes express milder versions of the same tensions that pushed Potts and White's participants to choose ethical consumption and to leave farm life (Potts and White 2007). Given that these women have not challenged rural norms during their adult lives to the extent that Potts and White's research participants have, it seems possible that some younger women are empowered by alternative messages in the media to make decisions that were deemed too

risky for their parents and grandparents. Research with contemporary farm women and children would explore how they engage with these dilemmas.

Men writing rural autobiographies certainly confirm Jim Sutton's assumptions about farm children. However, rhetoric like his overlooks the urban support for pest control reported during the 1990s (e.g. Fraser 2001) and the high levels of agreement that rabbits and other pest species should be killed in the interests of farming and conservation, even among urban women. Support for killing introduced species that are labelled pests and lack of expressed concern about the means of doing so was widespread in the childhood accounts of both rural men and women. Nearly half the male writers told stories about hunting rabbits and other animals. Those who set traps for rabbits or poisoned them remembered it purely as a means to an end. Those who used dogs, ferrets or guns to hunt remembered it with enthusiasm as a sport. But Sutton's rhetoric is clearly centred on particular male experiences and, if politicians want to improve understanding of complex environmental issues, they should engage with diverse views.

The 'hard man' image of people like W. V. Kerr, which draws on cultural resources like Barry Crump's stories, is challenging because of the way it integrates love of animals with ideas about domination. Smith (2006) argues that we need to understand the power of our mythologies and the ongoing potency of colonial tendencies. While Smith did not address gender differences, he did suggest that there is a productivist element in environmental agendas. The majority of rural autobiographies in my sample were by people whose ancestors came from the United Kingdom and who had profitable farming experiences, which reminds us that research should be designed to challenge the postcolonial assumptions Smith identifies.

This study aimed to provide a baseline in a debate that often cites anecdotal evidence and where knowledge of urban children is greater than of farm children. Future interviews with farm children from a variety of backgrounds who are knowledgeable about environmental issues in a general way, aware of concern about killing pest species and familiar with the concept of rabbits as pets will provide a testing ground for the argument over change in children's relationships with animals. Then it will be possible to explore how children's contemporary on-farm experiences interact with their consciousness of environmental and animal welfare issues.

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¹⁴ Lois' autobiography does not cover her life after she left the farm but she was involved in the Workers Educational Association or WEA. She loved reading and would probably have appreciated early environmental children's writers (Copeland 2004).

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